in which dried fish, raw meat, ghee butter and other foodstuffs are openly displayed. These goods are always black with flies and as one drives through the narrow streets of the shopping centre a black, buzzing cloud obscures the windscreen. In summer it is much worse. The Arabs are curiously indifferent to this plague of dirt, bad odour and insects, and will sit for hours outside the shops, idly gossiping, while flies settle on their beards and faces, fall into their Turkish tea, or get mixed up with their rice. It is almost impossible not to swallow flies when one is talking, and the only remedy when in these districts is to keep one's mouth tightly shut. I have seen Arab babies lying in the open air, their eyes swollen and festered from some disease and covered with flies. Trachoma and cataract are common troubles among the Arabs, and it is surprising that epidemics of typhoid and dysentery are not frequent.

The blame for this state of affairs cannot be laid on the Arab peasantry, who are illiterate, badly paid and poorly nourished. They have been brought up for centuries in primitive surroundings and have come to regard their way of life as natural and even congenial. It is curious that where the poorer class of Arab has come into close contact with the American or Englishman he has imitated, in a bizarre and comic fashion, the Western style of dress, but he has stopped short at the more important aspects of our civilization. Perhaps, in his present state of culture, the Arab has an ingrained scorn of sanitation and health. By disposition, and owing to the intense heat of the summer months, he is a lazy individual, judged by our standards, working only when he must or when the fancy takes him. But there are deeper reasons for the Arab's tolerance of dirt and disease. To say that his attitude is inborn, as some visitors to the Middle East are prone to do, is begging the question.

The Arab has some admirable virtues, not the least of which is his strong sense of hospitality and charity. The poor man seldom goes away empty-handed, and the visitor is always sure of a meal, a resting-place for the night, and coffee. If not always strictly truthful, the Arab is unfailingly polite and his courteous manners would often put a European to shame. He has outstanding courage, particularly in battle, and despises meanness and immorality. He is frugal, kindly unless his fierce pride and spirit of independence are upset, and intensely religious. Indeed, what impressed me most about the Arabs of all classes was their extreme devotion to the faith of the Prophet, and their realistic interpretation of the Koran, which means more to them in their daily lives than the Bible means

mile of shallow water. There was a haze over the land, a sure sign of hot weather ahead, and the straggling town of Ras-al-Khaimah had the blurred appearance of a Whistler pastel. The palace, cornered by battlemented towers with an architectural resemblance to a crusader's castle, was built of pink rock, the rose-red hue of Petra. In the sunlight it had the beauty of a coral shell, hemmed in by the cube-shaped houses of the merchants, walled gardens of date palms and pomegranates, and the gleaming gold dome of the mosque.

We disembarked alongside a little wooden pier and began to trail up the steep, pebbled shore towards the palace. A guard of Beni Yas tribesmen approached with rifles at the ready, until the Khan Sahib gave them a sign and spoke to them in the local dialect. Recognizing him, they bowed respectfully and, after scrutinizing us with a great show of curiosity, ushered us through the tall gateway into the palace courtyard. It was open to the sun, with two tall palm trees growing as high as the verandas, on which lolled Arab retainers in the act of performing their morning toilet. Camels, tied to stakes in the ground, reared up on their knees as we entered and began to snarl in their unpleasant fashion.

Standing in an ornately-decorated doorway was a tall, white-bearded figure, clad in long white robes, with a gold sword belted to his waist. It was Sheikh Sultan bin Salim, ruler of Ras-al-Khaimah. He slowly descended the steps to the courtyard and embraced the Khan Sahib in the Arab style, and then shook hands with each of us in turn. In a few minutes we were joined by the members of the Court, and the procession wended its way into the cool, dim reception chamber at the far end of the palace. The building was in a much better state of repair than the palace at Sharjah, and the floor of the chamber was of black and white marble squares, highly polished by sandals. The chairs, of rosewood inlaid with mother o' pearl, were emblazoned with the sheikh's coat of arms, whilst priceless Shiraz rugs, of wine red and Prussian blue pattern, were scattered on the floor.

Silk cushions were provided for us to sit upon, and after the usual introductory conversation, a slave brought in a pot of fragrant coffee. A large brass tray was placed by our side; this contained numerous sweetmeats, including Turkish delight, and little bowls of pomegranates, oranges and almonds. The sheikh questioned us about our journey, and seemed highly amused when we told him of the breakdown of the cars. He soon started off on a long discourse about the advantages of having an airfield at Ras-al-Khaimah,

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

It was, indeed, a month of incidents. Several members of my Indian staff fell sick; I had trouble with the Sikh carpenters who had been sent from Karachi to re-build one of the launches, and they had to be sent back; the Bedouins had encamped on the sandhills between Sharjah and Dubai, and were giving trouble to our convoys; one of the turbines of the power station broke down, and a sit-down strike among the Arab workmen held up the work of building the new staff quarters' block. I had already been criticized by headquarters for not speeding up this work, which was not my responsibility but that of the Public Works Department.

The excuse given by the senior engineer was that shortage of materials was responsible for the delay, but on investigation it transpired that lack of proper supervision was the real cause of the trouble. The overseer was an Assyrian, and he had little authority over the Arabs, who would work only when they were closely watched. Directly the overseer's back was turned they would sit on the roof and go to sleep. The foundations and walls had been erected months ago, but the building was still roofless in May; as a result, the wooden frames of the doors and windows were beginning to shrink and crack. Eventually the supervision was put in charge of an R.A.F. corporal—a native of Cardiff—and within two weeks the Arabs were working like slaves and the roof was finished.

During this period I had numerous visitors who were far from welcome, but whom I had to entertain for political reasons. The Sheikh of Sharjah usually came twice a week, bringing his sons and secretary with him. As his visits usually lasted for two hours it meant that my morning's work was set aside. It was customary to serve him with fruit and coffee, either in the mess or on the roof-garden of the Fort, and on each occasion he managed to consume our total supplies of fruit. Quite often the bearers had to raid our staff supplies, from bedroom tables, in order to satiate his greed. I was obliged to sit through this gorging performance and make polite conversation.

The sheikh's visits always had an underlying motive; either he wanted to borrow spare parts for his car, or wished the radio officer to repair his wireless set; sometimes he wanted me to order him some fruit from India, or give him a supply of vegetable plants and flowers. When he sat in the mess, he invariably removed copies of *The Tatler* or *Country Life*, although he could read neither of these publications. These visits were made in ceremonial dress,

622 574 609

including gold swords and daggers, and he was accompanied by his ruffianly guard—who also expected coffee. There was nothing informal about Sheikh Sultan, and each time he came to the Fort I was obliged to make a rapid change from shorts and bush shirt into my palm beach uniform.

The Sheikh of Dubai, who never asked any favours but who once sent me two beautiful pearls as a gift, paid but one visit to the Fort. That was in the company of all the sheikhs of the Trucial Oman Coast, who assembled there to meet the British Resident, Sir Geoffrey Prior, and journey with him to the neutral territory of Baraimi, where he held a 'durbar'. Next to Sultan bin Saqr, my most frequent visitor was the picturesque Sheikh of Ajman, Raschid bin Hamid, a handsome man of thirty, who resembled the pre-Raphælite portraits of Christ. He was tall for an Arab, with an aristocratic bearing and clean-cut features. Of pure Bedouin stock, he had their fair skin and piercing blue eyes, and wore a carefully oiled and trimmed black beard. Raschid was the only sheikh in Oman to own horses, which are not suited to this part of the Arabian desert; he was a superb horseman and a great hunter.

Sheikh Raschid had a tremendous sense of humour and I believe he only came to the Fort to plague me. He would arrive at the most unexpected and inconvenient times, bringing with him a ruffianly rabble of hangers-on, including his chief minister, or wazir, Hussein, a grimy looking old villain who spoke a few words of execrable English. Sultan bin Saqr, who was his overchief, did not approve of these visits, since Raschid was only a sub-chief of Ajman, a small dependency of Sharjah. Raschid was full of intrigue, and was believed to be making secret agreements with the Americans, authorizing them to drill for oil on his territory; this was strictly against the treaty which Sultan bin Saqr had signed with the British Government and gave rise to considerable local embarrassment. The wily Raschid knew quite well that he could not implement his promises, and yet had no scruples in taking money for these illegal concessions.

The Khan Bahadur asked me on one occasion to try and discourage Raschid from paying his tiresome visits to the Fort, but he was so persistent that the task was a well-nigh impossible one. It was impossible to offend him; if one were at all brusque he would roar with laughter, take one by the arm and begin a long discussion about his latest hunting trip. I liked him immensely, for he was

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

really a most lovable ruffian, his Christ-like face contrasting oddly with the fanatical fire in his eyes. Hussein, his minister, despite his dirty clothes and unkempt beard, also amused me very much; he carried a huge sword, whilst his belt was always bulging with weapons—knives, Muscat daggers, and a Mauser pistol. He was the living embodiment of Captain Teach, the eighteenth century pirate.

Sheikh Raschid was always pestering me to visit his 'palace' at Ajman and accompany him on a gazelle hunt so, partly in order to placate him and partly because I liked the rascal, I eventually agreed to accept his invitation. I chose a week-end in May when, owing to bad weather at Barhain and Karachi, aircraft had been held up for a few days. Ellis, the Station Engineer, who had performed several tasks for the sheikh, was also invited, and we made arrangements to set off in one of the cars after lunch. A few minutes before we were due to leave the Fort three camels put in an appearance. The servant who brought them explained that Sheikh Raschid bin Hamid considered that they would be more comfortable for the journey.

As a rule I dislike riding camels; I consider they are one of the most uncomfortable modes of transport ever discovered. In this case, however, I was glad of them. The route to Ajman lies through tracks of deep, soft sand, in which the tyres of vehicles invariably get stuck. To extricate them is a long and difficult task, frequently requiring the aid of another vehicle. Soft sand is far worse than mud, and even if the wheels do not sink in it, they slip and slither all over the place, so that it is a matter of extreme luck if you do not hit a palm tree or a rock. Wheel chains are of little help, as they seem to plunge the car deeper into the sand. The only way to negotiate soft sand successfully is to drive at great speed and take a zig-zag course.

Ajman lay to the north of Sharjah, beyond the little fishing village of Hera; the distance was not more than five miles but the camels were slow and it took us an hour to reach the outskirts of the town. There are two Ajmans on the map—the town proper and the district surrounding it, which has an area of about ten square miles. Most of it is bare desert, full of *wadhis* and sandhills, but near the sea-shore there are flourishing date plantations, whereas Sharjah does not boast a single one.

The town is much pleasanter than Sharjah. The track leading to it is indescribably bad, being full of pot-holes, old wells, rocks

poisoning the larvæ, would destroy the tribe's food supply. This produced more laughter, since the locust is only regarded as an occasional tit-bit and is not a regular part of their diet. The sheikh pulled his beard, roared with laughter at this sally, revealing his long, yellow fangs, and finally agreed to provide as many guides as the party required.

A shout from one of the guards caused Hadi to leap to his feet and run towards the entrance. He returned in a moment to inform us that a caravan of raiders, presumably *Badus*, had passed the encampment about a mile away. We hurriedly left the tent and were just in time to see the raiding party, which consisted of about fifty camels, disappearing in the dust at great speed. Hadi said they were moving in the direction of Dubai and probably had as their objective one of the numerous villages near the coast. Sheikh Mohammed denied that they were men of his tribe, but Tandy afterwards told me that there was some doubt as to the truth of this statement.

When we returned to the tent, a slave brought in bowls of warm camels' milk which were passed round the circle. It was very refreshing and had a sweet taste, though I did not relish drinking from the bowl after it had passed the lips of my exceedingly dirty hosts. In few, if any books on desert travel is the dirtiness of the Arabs referred to; this is either because the authors have become enured to their primitive surroundings and take them for granted, or else because they consider it bad form to allow such commonplace details to intrude into their art. Both St. John Philby and Mr. Bertram Thomas are liberal in their allusions to camel dung, but their awareness of the filth and odours of Arab towns is never made apparent to the reader. Unfortunately I was born with a fastidious mind and a nose as sensitive as an insect's antennæ, and no amount of admiration for the Arabs can make me oblivious of their habits, although some Arabs are far cleaner than many Europeans.

When the bowls of milk had been passed round we were pressed to partake of dates, covered thickly with flies, little squares of Turkish delight, chipatties with a coating of *ghi*, and good Arab coffee. After a smoke and some light conversation, we had more coffee, until Tandy, reminding the sheikh that we must take our departure, asked permission to leave. There was a very strong smell of camel in the tent; the creatures were tethered to ropes outside, and were growling and swearing because they were being

574 609 milked. The remnants of our meal were soon gobbled up by a crowd of retainers and servants who had been hanging around the tent door, impatiently awaiting our departure. Sheikh Mohammed was exceedingly pleased to receive a gift of two 2-cwt. bags of white flour which Tandy had brought in the car, a present from the British Government.

[777] I had wished to take a photograph of the sheikh and managed to do so when he was not looking; the old man greatly objected to cameras, as he believed that an enemy, by looking at the print, could cause him evil by witchcraft. He is extremely superstitious and, had he seen my camera, would have demanded its destruction. As it was we parted on the best of terms, the sheikh and his retainers 600 walking with us as far as the car. The sun was beginning to drop behind the sand-dunes as we left, casting a rosy glow over the foothills of Jebel-al-Faiyah, so we sped along the rough track at top speed, stopping at the wells to say good-bye to the headman, and at the derelict fort near Djaidh to take a photograph—which did not come out, as I had foolishly forgotten to turn the film. Twelve miles from Djaidh our truck broke down (we found out later that water had got into the carburettor), and we prepared for a night in the desert, collecting dead tree stumps and dry branches of acacia to light a fire.

The sun fell sharply behind the sandhills, making long shadows on the dunes, and the mountains turned purple and then black. Venus and Sirius gleamed like diamonds, and the sickle of a new moon shone with the radiance of polished silver; the stars in the desert sky were unusually bright and we gazed at Aldebaran, the Pleiades, Orion's Belt, Castor and Pollux, the Heavenly Twins. The fire burned up fiercely, for there was a chilly sea breeze, and we huddled together round it, eating an Arab sweetmeat which Jasim produced.

We were about to make a rough tent out of our coats and a sheet from the truck and settle down for the night, when our driver called out that he saw a light ahead. It was a speck of white in the distance, but it soon grew larger and we saw that it was the glare of a car's headlamps. We switched on our own lights and made a signal. When it drove up, it turned out to be one of the Anti-Locust Commission's trucks. They had awaited our return and, when darkness fell, had correctly assumed that we had had a breakdown and had come out to help us. We were unable to repair our own vehicle, having no suitable tools, so,